DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 365 960 CS 011 555

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TITLE Preservice Teachers' Reactions to Immersion in an Interactive Approach to Literacy Instruction.
PUB DATE Dec 93
NOTE 5p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (43rd, Charleston, SC, December 1-4, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cooperative Learning; Elementary Education; Higher Education; *Instructional Effectiveness; Language Arts; *Preservice Teacher Education; Reading Aloud to Others; *Reading Instruction; Reading Research; *Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Interactive Teaching; Preservice Teachers; Social Constructivism

ABSTRACT

A study explored the degree to which preservice teachers perceived that the interactive approach to language arts instruction was valuable in promoting their learning. Subjects, 63 students in two sections of an undergraduate reading course, completed a five-item questionnaire focusing on specific aspects of the course. Quantitative data analysis indicated that students agreed that read alouds, strategy application, "drop everything and read" time, chapter entries, article sharing, and cooperative learning were valuable in promoting their learning, in providing information for practical classroom application, and were enjoyable. Qualitative analysis of free responses indicated an awareness of the learning process and a view of learning that could be placed on a continuum from solitary transmission to social construction. Findings suggest that by immersing students in interactive approaches, teacher educators can have an impact on preservice teachers' learning. (RS)

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PRESERVICE TEACHERS' REACTIONS TO IMMERSION IN AN INTERACTIVE APPROACH TO LITERACY INSTRUCTION

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Objectives

This research was an exploration of the degree to which preservice teachers perceived that approaches to language arts teacher preparation promoted in the literature and implemented in their undergraduate reading course facilitated learning of content, provided information for future practical classroom applications and were enjoyable. The following questions were the focus of the investigation: 1) to what degree do preservice teachers feel that specific aspects of an interactive approach are valuable in promoting their learning? 2) to what degree do preservice teachers feel that specific aspects of an interactive approach are useful in providing future practical classroom applications? 3) to what degree do preservice teachers feel that specific aspects of an interactive approach are enjoyable? The questions reflect three criteria for the evaluation of reading coursework that emerged from a 1991 study of responses in students' reflective journals.

Perspectives

The field of reading research, theory and instruction has undergone considerable change in recent years (Goodman, 1989). However, preservice teachers' views of teaching reading are based on assumptions and beliefs usually formed as a result of their earlier personal schooling experiences. In most cases their reading instruction occurred as a transmission of knowledge rather than as a process of interaction and construction of knowledge (Brazee & Kristo, 1986).

In order to influence change in preservice teachers' views of teaching reading, Joyce and Weil (1986) propose that teacher educators model instructional approaches that they suggest their students use. Such practices include: active student involvement; an integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and thinking; student choice; alternative assessment approaches; opportunities for students to read and write daily; cooperative learning; reading aloud to students; and strategy instruction. Kelly and Farnan (1990) state that teacher educators should be "practicing what we teach" (p. 264) and designing instruction that is congruent with the practices they are promoting. Hollingsworth (1989) and Brazee and Kristo (1986) suggest that in order to encourage future teachers to use methods that reflect current research findings and trends in instruction, students must be provided active experiences with new approaches in their reading and language arts coursework. Brandt (1988) believes that in such an approach, content is learned through carefully planned activities and understanding of process is activated through interaction with thoughtfully chosen content.

Methods and Procedures

The participants in the study were 63 students in two sections of an undergraduate reading course titled Developmental Reading. This course is required of all education majors at the university.

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A survey was conducted half-way through the semester in order that the instructor could make any suggested changes in instruction, activities, assignments and grading procedures before the end of the semester.

Data were collected using a five item questionnaire. The first three items of the questionnaire focused on specific features of the instructional approach (e.g. Drop Everything And Read time (DEAR)), read alouds, cooperative learning, etc.). The students were asked to rate each feature on a seven point Likert scale, indicating the degree to which it facilitated learning, provided information for classroom application and was enjoyable. Each item also included space for a free response. The fourth item asked students if they would change the instructional approach, activities, assignments and grading procedures, and if so, how they would change them. The final item asked students for an overall rating of the class and provided space for a free response.

Descriptive statistics for each feature were calculated. A t-test was conducted to determine if there were significant differences in perceived learning, information for classroom application and enjoyment, between students who had not completed their classroom observation and those who had. An ANOVA was carried out to explore differences among areas of specialization (i.e., early childhood, elementary education, and reading). Free responses were analyzed using procedures outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Marshall and Rossman (1989), Patton (1990) and Spradley (1979). These procedures were used to generate categories and identify themes and trends emerging from the responses.

Results

The quantitative data analysis indicated that students agreed that read alouds, strategy application, DEAR, chapter entries, article sharing and cooperative learning, were valuable in promoting their learning, providing information for practical classroom application and were enjoyable. The means for each feature on the 7 point Likert scale ranged from 4.707 (enjoyment of chapter entries) to 6.638 (enjoyment of DEAR and read alouds) with all means but one above 5.24. These preservice teachers indicated that the most valuable feature of the instructional approach was cooperative learning (X=6.263). The activities which students indicated were most useful for practical classroom application were DEAR (X=6,36), read alouds (X=6.33), cooperative learning and strategy application (X=6.18). The most enjoyable activities were read alouds (X=6.64), DEAR (6.64), and cooperative learning (6.30). cooperative learning was the feature of the instructional approach that most facilitated learning, provided practical classroom application and was enjoyable. When asked whether the instructional approach , assignments, activities and grading should be changed the students overwhelmingly indicated their desire to maintain the instructional approach.

Although there were differences in group means (i.e., early childhood, elementary education and reading) for promoting learning, practical application and enjoyable on each feature of the instructional approach, only one of these differences was significant ($p<.05$) and that was the difference between the three groups for the value of chapter entries. In all cases the mean for the students who had completed their classroom observation was lower than students who had not begun their observation for

learning value, practical application and enjoyment for each feature of the instructional approach. In the case of the value of chapter entries to students learning and providing classroom application there were significant differences ($p<.05$) for students who had not yet begun their classroom observation.

The qualitative analysis of free responses revealed that students identified specific aspects of the approach (e.g., DEAR, read alouds, cooperative learning) and why they responded as they did. The features that prompted the most responses were cooperative learning, DEAR and read alouds. Responses for cooperative learning related to their learning and their future students' learning. Students indicated that read alouds provided them with knowledge and appreciation of children's literature and DEAR provided them with the opportunity to read and relax.

Throughout the free responses students' comments indicated an awareness of the learning process; their own learning process and how that knowledge relates to children's learning. Their responses also reflected a view of learning that could be placed on a continuum from solitary transmission to social construction. Although the comments of two of the students reflected a solitary transmission view of reading instruction, all other students' comments reflected a move from a solitary transmission view to a social constructivist view. In many cases this stance stressed the importance of the social and emotional environment of the classroom. Students also indicated characteristics of the organization, activities and assignments that impeded their learning. These characteristics were modified following the class evaluation.

Educational Importance

The literature in reading/language arts suggests changes in instruction in elementary school classrooms. The challenge for teacher educators is to design instruction that is congruent with these changes and prepares future teachers to implement appropriate reading/language arts instruction. The degree to which students develop an awareness of appropriate classroom reading/language arts practices, procedures for implementing such practices and their affective reaction to involvement in such practices, offers promise for future implementation in their own classrooms. By determining students perceptions of the effectiveness, practicality and enjoyment of classroom methodology, teacher educators can better design coursework to meet students' needs and prepare them to carry out appropriate instruction in their future classrooms. This study indicates that by immersing students in the practices we are promoting we can have an impact on their learning. The next step is to see if this learning transfers to practice.

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